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In Bow to Seoul, U.S. Eases Some Restrictions on N. Korea

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Eased U.S. restrictions on diplomatic contact, travel and humanitarian trade with North Korea, announced at the State Department yesterday, are not likely to dispel the longstanding hostility between Washington and Pyongyang, but could lead to gradual reduction of tensions, according to State Department officials and unofficial U.S. experts.

State Department spokesman Charles E. Redman announced the measures, which were cast primarily as support for South Korean President Roh Tae Woo's recent conciliatory initiatives toward the communist North.

As expected, the State Department reviewed its on-again, off-again permission for

U.S. diplomats to hold substantive discussions with North Korean officials in neutral settings, agreed to encourage unofficial travel between the United States and North Korea and indicated a willingness to permit limited North Korean purchases of U.S. medicine, food and clothing on a "humanitarian basis."

The administration did not remove North Korea from its list of nations engaged in international terrorism, nor did it issue a broad exemption from the 38-year-old ban on U.S.-North Korean trade.

Redman said the United States had asked North Korea's senior allies, China and the Soviet Union, to convey U.S. views to Pyongyang. Redman called for "a positive, constructive response" from North Korea to the U.S. moves and listed several steps that Pyongyang could take in returning—including progress in the South-North dia-

logue, elimination of anti-American propaganda and return of some U.S. remains from the Korean war.

State Department officials with expertise in Korean affairs said they do not expect an early policy shift by Pyongyang, although one official said he believes there is "a better than even chance" that South Korean President Roh will succeed in his drive for a summit meeting with North Korean President Kim Il Sung.

Whatever Pyongyang's response, this U.S. official said, Roh's initiative will have improved his domestic political standing in the South, especially by capturing the powerful issue of reunification from radical students and other opponents of the Seoul regime, and by showing that he can take important international stands independent of the United States.

Selig Harrison of the Carnegie Endow-

ment for International Peace, who visited Pyongyang in October 1987, said the U.S. measures are "a good start, but only a start." For quicker progress, Harrison said, Washington should show interest in a North Korean proposal of July 1987 for talks in China involving the United States and the two Koreas.

The recent U.S. and South Korean initiatives and similar moves in Japan, Harrison said, "will be definitely very helpful in strengthening the hand of outward-looking, more internationalist elements" in the North Korean capital. He predicted, though, that "there won't be an immediate thaw."

Kang Sok Ju, North Korea's deputy minister of foreign affairs, said in a Sept. 30 interview with The Washington Post at the United Nations that "we want to have a di-

rect dialogue with the United States and negotiations to discuss replacing the armistice with a peace agreement." The United States and South Korea have rejected such discussions on grounds they are aimed at the removal of U.S. troops from Korea prior to the easing of the South-North military confrontation.

Prof. Gari Ledyard of Columbia University, who visited Pyongyang last June, said North Korean authorities "are interested in pursuing the leads" provided by more conciliatory policies toward them, but that "there will be a lot of nitpicking" before fundamental change is in sight.

The key question is whether North Korea can open itself to outside influences in a manner resembling that of China, Ledyard said. "They are both fascinated [by Chinese economic progress] and scared to death by the loss of tight control," Ledyard said. There is no sense of crisis in Pyongyang that impels the leadership there to quick action, he said.

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